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Authenticity in Musical Performance: Perspectives from Analytic Philosophy

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ABSTRACT: Debates about musical authenticity have long structured disputes over performance practice, particularly in relation to historically informed performance, yet they remain marked by persistent disagreement and conceptual instability. This article provides a systematic reconstruction of these debates in analytic philosophy of music, arguing that authenticity cannot be understood as a unitary ideal. It distinguishes four interrelated dimensions through which authenticity is invoked: ontological, concerning the nature of musical works and the objects of performance fidelity; epistemological, concerning the justification and limits of historically grounded claims; axiological, concerning the normative value of authenticity relative to other musical goods; and cultural, concerning issues of social identity and musical authority, as well as the question of who has the right to perform certain works or genres of music. By tracing how these dimensions recur across debates about performance, the article clarifies the structure of contemporary authenticity discourse and explains why disputes have proven resistant to resolution.

KEYWORDS: musical authenticity, historically informed performance, ontology of music, epistemology of performance, performance practice, philosophy of music

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INTRODUCTION

How should we perform the music of the past? This apparently simple question has fueled one of the most enduring and contentious debates in contemporary music, centered on the contested ideal of "authenticity." This article examines the evolution of that debate within late-twentieth-century English-language research on music in analytic philosophy, largely from scholars based in the United States, the United Kingdom, and New Zealand, tracing its significance for contemporary thinking about musical performance. Much of the philosophical literature surveyed in what follows takes Western art music as its primary, often implicit, point of reference. In particular, many discussions of authenticity presuppose a conception of music centered on the performance of notated works by identifiable individual composers. While this framework proves fruitful for analyzing a significant portion of the repertoire and scholarship under discussion, it does not straightforwardly extend to all of the world's musical practices. This limitation should be borne in mind in the early sections of the article; approaches that engage more explicitly with a broader range of musical traditions, and which challenge or revise these underlying assumptions, are considered in the final section.

The immediate context for twentieth-century philosophical discussions about authenticity was a series of practical developments in performance practice, most notably the rise of the historically informed performance (HIP) movement in Western art music (Haskell 1988; Butt 2002). By challenging long-established interpretive traditions, HIP made questions of historical fidelity newly urgent. The intellectual roots of this movement are often traced to the late nineteenth century, when changes in instruments and performance conventions disrupted any sense of an unbroken performance tradition. Appeals to authenticity emerged as attempts to determine how music composed under very different historical conditions might be performed in the present.

A more decisive shift occurred in the decades following the Second World War, when a new generation of scholar-performers, including Nikolaus Harnoncourt in Vienna, argued that historical instruments and performance practices were not optional supplements but central to understanding earlier music (Harnoncourt

1988). Performances and recordings from the 1960s and 1970s offered a clear alternative to established Romantic traditions. Typically lighter in texture and more sharply articulated, they attracted a growing and committed audience.

By the 1980s, HIP had achieved substantial mainstream recognition and influence. Its aesthetic assumptions increasingly shaped professional standards for the performance and recording of baroque and classical repertoire, developing into a major artistic and commercial enterprise. This success, however, also prompted sustained criticism. Musicologists such as Richard Taruskin (1982, 1995) argued that the movement's appeal to historical objectivity rested on uncertain foundations and that its stylistic preferences reflected modern values as much as historical ones. The historical performance movement, Taruskin believed, was a modern, and a modernist, phenomenon, and its notion of "authenticity" was an important modernist trope. He wrote that " 'historical' performers who aim 'to get to the truth'…by using period instruments and reviving lost playing techniques actually pick and choose from history's wares. And they do so in a manner that says more about the values of the late twentieth century than about those of any earlier era" (Taruskin 1995, 164). Such critiques suggested that disagreements about performance practice could not be resolved by historical or empirical research alone.

Against this backdrop, by the beginning of the 1980s, questions of authenticity began to attract sustained philosophical attention rather than remaining confined to musicians' practical debates (Godlovitch 1988). The issue was no longer simply how best to realize a historical score but whether the ideal of authenticity itself was coherent, defensible, or normatively significant. At the same time, philosophical reflection increasingly recognized that authenticity is not solely a historical matter. Musical works and practices are embedded in social and cultural contexts that shape both their meaning and the conditions under which performances can claim legitimacy. Inquiry thus shifted from disputes about historical reconstruction to the conceptual foundations of authenticity as a normative ideal.

The remainder of this article reconstructs the ensuing debate by distinguishing four interrelated questions along which disputes about musical authenticity have been articulated. After an initial discussion that introduces the notion of authenticity, each of the following sections addresses one of these questions. At the most basic level lies an *ontological question*: What is a musical work, and which of its features are essential to its identity? Different answers generate different, sometimes incompatible standards of authentic performance, locating fidelity in abstract sound structures, historically situated practices, or composers' intentions. Once such ontological commitments are in place, an *epistemological question* arises concerning how claims to authenticity are justified. Historically informed performance appeals to evidence such as period instruments, contemporary conventions, treatises, notation, and composers' remarks, yet the reliability and authority of these sources remain contested. This section discusses this issue. However, even if adequate historical knowledge were available, a further *axiological question* would remain: Why should fidelity to historically identified features matter? Authenticity may be treated as an intrinsic aesthetic or ethical value, or as one musical good among others, such as expressiveness, originality, or relevance, depending on one's evaluative priorities. Finally, these debates intersect with a *cultural question* concerning who is entitled to claim or enact authenticity. In musical practices closely tied to social identity and historical experience, authenticity often functions as a claim about authority and legitimacy, rather than mere technical correctness. Examining these questions shows why authenticity has resisted reduction to a single governing norm. Rather than designating a unified prescriptive standard, authenticity functions as a plural and context-sensitive concept, whose meaning and normative force depend on the interaction of various considerations.

AUTHENTICITY

Authenticity is a philosophically complex, elusive notion. At a basic level, to call something authentic is to say that it is a genuine or proper instance of whatever category is at issue. Etymologically, the term derives from the ancient Greek noun *authentēs* and the adjective *authentikos*, which convey notions of self-originating authority and non-derivativeness. In this sense, to judge something authentic is to affirm that it is what it purports to be, rather than a deceptive or fabricated imitation (Bertinetto 2020, 1).

As its Greek origins already suggest, the concept of authenticity is historically and culturally specific. Contemporary authenticity discourse is indeed largely a product of Western intellectual traditions, developing primarily in the modern period (Ferrara 1998). However, many cultures do not organize evaluative practices around the same concerns, and some do not even possess a direct equivalent of the term (Gutschow 2017, 1–4). The centrality of authenticity thus reflects a particular constellation of Western values and assumptions, rather than a universally shared evaluative framework.

In the realm of the arts, one of the most familiar uses of the term contrasts what is authentic with what is false or non-genuine (Dutton 2009, 258). A painting, for example, is said to be authentic if it genuinely was created by the artist to whom it is attributed and is not a forgery or an imitation; similarly, an archaeological artifact or a historical manuscript is authentic insofar as it genuinely originates from the source as claimed. In this respect, judgments of authenticity here are closely tied to questions of legal attribution in art and economic value: To count as authentic is ipso facto to count as valuable, with direct financial consequences for the artist or owner. Authenticity thus functions not merely as a descriptive category but as a mechanism of cultural regulation, structuring access to recognition and economic capital.

Crucially, however, "authentic"—in both the arts and other domains—is not an absolute predicate. Its meaning remains indeterminate until the relevant context of application has been specified. In this sense, something is authentic only relative to a particular description or reference class. Thus, although authenticity is often treated as a single ideal, this usage obscures the fact that authenticity operates along multiple dimensions and acquires different meanings depending on the context in which it is applied.

As Stephen Davies (2001, 203) notes, "authentic" is a term we use to classify things, and the same object can be categorized in different ways depending on the perspective adopted. A counterfeit banknote, for example, is inauthentic when categorized as legal currency, yet it remains a genuine piece of printed paper. Likewise, a tourist experience may be highly inauthentic with respect to everyday local practice, while being perfectly authentic as a commercial cultural performance. In the same way, a forged Raphael painting is inauthentic when considered as a work by Raphael but may still be an authentic artifact of a particular forger. Every use of the term, therefore, implicitly raises the question: *Authentic with respect to what?*

The contextual and relational character of authenticity helps clarify a fundamental distinction in the way the concept operates across different artistic domains, in particular between the visual arts (such as painting and sculpture) and the performing arts (such as music, theatre, and dance). In the visual arts, debates about authenticity have traditionally centered on what is often called *provenance authenticity*, or what Denis Dutton (2009, 259) refers to as *nominal authenticity*. This concerns the correctness of the relationship between an object's claimed origins—its authorship, date, or historical source—and its actual causal history. An artwork is authentic in this sense if it truly is what it is taken to be and genuinely has the history attributed to it. Much philosophical discussion of authenticity has focused on this issue, especially in connection with forgery, counterfeiting, and plagiarism. Where it can be established, authenticity of provenance is an empirical matter: It depends on facts about production, causation, and historical origin.

Alongside this meaning, however, there is a second and more controversial sense of authenticity that is of particular importance for the philosophy of music. This can be called *performance authenticity*. Unlike a painting or a statue, which exists as a singular, materially fixed object with a determinate causal history, a musical work

cannot be equated with any particular physical object. In many music traditions, it is specified through a score or other symbolic medium and exists only through its multiple performances. As a result, its identity is not exhausted by facts about origin or production but depends on the preservation of certain features across distinct instantiations. These features may include structural relations, pitch and rhythmic organization, stylistic norms, expressive aims, or historically situated performance conventions. Because a musical work admits of repeated and variable realization, judgments of authenticity in performance concern whether, and to what extent, a given performance preserves those features taken to be constitutive of the work.

In this respect, performance authenticity differs fundamentally from provenance authenticity. Whereas provenance authenticity turns on whether an object stands in the correct causal relation to a particular act of creation, performance authenticity concerns the *normative question* of how a work ought to be realized in sound. A forged painting cannot become authentic through improved interpretation or presentation, since its inauthenticity resides precisely in its origin. A musical performance, by contrast, can succeed or fail in authenticity even when its provenance is unproblematic, depending on how it realizes the relevant features of the work. Moreover, while provenance authenticity is typically an all-or-nothing matter, performance authenticity admits of degrees, since different performances may preserve different subsets of the features taken to be essential. A performance may be authentic with respect to structural or stylistic features while less so with respect to expressive or historically specific ones, or vice versa.

This difference has far-reaching consequences. Performance authenticity is not a matter of recovering an original object but of deciding which features of a work should guide its present realization. Disagreements about authenticity in performance, therefore, primarily reflect disagreements about what counts as constitutive of a performance work in the first place—a concern that necessarily goes beyond concrete performance choices and leads into deeper metaphysical issues.

AUTHENTICITY AND ONTOLOGICAL ISSUES

At the heart of debates about musical authenticity lies a question that is philosophical in origin but practical in consequence: What kind of entity is a musical work, and which of its properties are essential to its identity? When critics or listeners disagree about whether a given performance is "faithful" or "authentic," they are often implicitly disagreeing about what the performance is meant to realize. Is it a sequence of sounds, an abstract compositional structure, a historically situated artistic act, or some combination of these? In philosophical aesthetics, such issues are typically treated as *ontological questions*—questions concerning the fundamental nature and identity of musical works. (For a recent overview of debates in the ontology of music, see Davies 2020.) How these questions are answered determines what a performance must, in principle, be faithful to and thus establishes the criteria by which authenticity is judged.

In work on aesthetics in analytic philosophy, the debate on musical ontology intensified following the publication of Nelson Goodman's (1968) *Languages of Art*. In chapter 3 of that book, Goodman famously distinguished between autographic and allographic arts. Autographic arts, such as painting, are defined by the originality of a physical object, such that authenticity depends on the object itself; allographic arts, such as music, are defined by notational or symbolic instructions, so that authenticity concerns faithful realization rather than material originality. On Goodman's account, a performance is faithful only if it reproduces every note of the score exactly, as a single deviation would compromise its authenticity—a stipulation often regarded as counterintuitive. Conversely, non-notational elements, including tempo, dynamics, and articulation, do not determine the work's identity; substantial variation in these respects is compatible with a correct performance. These distinctions provoked extensive debate, as philosophers and music theorists sought to refine or contest Goodman's criteria, none of which proved entirely satisfactory (see Ridley 2012, 663; for a critical discussion

of Goodman's position, see Giombini 2017, 61–78). Contemporary discussions of musical authenticity can therefore be understood as ongoing efforts to specify what it means to realize a work faithfully in performance, elaborating and critically engaging Goodman's foundational framework.

As of today, the philosophical literature on musical ontology is commonly divided into two broad families of views, each encompassing a range of sub-positions (Davies 2001, 2020). One family treats musical works as relatively "thin" entities: abstract structures defined primarily by their sonic organization (Kivy 1983, 2002; Scruton 1997; Dodd 2007, 2010, 2020a). The other understands works as "thicker" entities, whose identity is essentially bound up with particular instruments, performance practices, notational conventions, and historical circumstances of production (Levinson 1980, 1990a, 1990b; Davies 2001).

The *thin*, or *sonicist*, position identifies a musical work primarily with its sound structure. According to this view, the identity of a work is exhausted by those properties that are directly available to perception in listening—such as pitch relations, rhythm, and, on some accounts, timbre—while factors such as provenance, authorial intention, or historical context play no constitutive role. A performance counts as authentic insofar as it preserves these perceptible relationships, even if the original instruments or historical conventions are altered. Instrumentation, notation, and compositional context are treated as contingent aids to realization, rather than as elements that define what the work is.

Within this camp, further distinctions can be drawn concerning which sonic properties are essential. "Pure sonicism" restricts the work's identity to temporally ordered patterns of pitched sounds, explicitly excluding timbre from the work's defining features (Kivy 1983). More permissive versions—often described as "timbral" sonicism—hold that timbral qualities may be among a work's essential properties, alongside melodic, harmonic, and rhythmic structures (Dodd 2010, 2020a). On this latter account, fidelity can be achieved whenever the relevant acoustic profile is preserved, regardless of the physical means by which it is produced. Instrumental substitution is therefore permissible, provided that it does not disrupt the intended sonic result.

Across sonicist views, scores are understood as historically situated instructions for producing certain sounds rather than as repositories of historically binding performance norms. The work itself is taken to exist independently of any particular performance or context of origin, and authenticity is assessed by reference to perceptible sound alone. This emphasis on acoustic preservation underwrites the universalist ambition of thin ontologies: Musical works are conceived as abstract objects whose identity remains stable across changing practices and historical settings (Dodd 2007).

The *thick*, or *contextualist*, position, by contrast, emphasizes that a work's identity is inseparable from its historical and practical conditions (Levinson 1980, 1990a, 1990b; Davies 1991, 2001, 2003). On this view, the essential properties of a musical work are not limited to its audible structure but may include the specific instruments for which a work was conceived, the performance practices it presupposes, and the compositional techniques available at the time of its creation. A musical work is brought into existence by a composer at a particular historical moment, and its identity depends in part on these situated conditions. Deviating from them does more than alter surface style; it risks compromising features that are constitutive of the work itself.

Under this conception, musical works are not abstract, timeless entities but historically embedded artistic objects whose identity is encoded in the material, technological, and cultural practices within which they originate. Instruments are media whose affordances shape the expressive and aesthetic character of the work. Authentic performance, therefore, requires more than an accurate realization of notes and rhythms: It demands sensitivity to the historically determined intentions, constraints, and expressive resources that informed the act of composition. Fidelity is measured by whether the performance instantiates the work as historically conceived.

Stronger versions of contextualism extend this claim beyond instrumentation and performance technique to include broader historical, artistic, biographical, and cultural properties (Moore 2012; Moruzzi 2019). On such accounts, factors such as who composed the work, when and where it was composed, and under what artistic or social conditions can be identity-determining, even in cases where two sound-events are acoustically

indistinguishable. From this perspective, perceptual sameness does not guarantee work-identity, and authenticity cannot be reduced to sonic fidelity alone.

As can be seen, the conflict between thin and thick ontologies is not merely practical—about which instruments to use or which styles to adopt—but *metaphysical*: It centers on the nature of authenticity itself. Thin ontologies maintain that authenticity can be achieved through acoustic preservation alone, permitting instrumental substitution and adaptation of performance practices, so long as the relevant sound structure is preserved. Thick ontologies counter that such substitutions risk eliminating properties essential to the work's identity, because historically specific conventions often carry expressive, structural, or evaluative significance that is not reducible to sound.

Concrete examples may help clarify what is at stake in this dispute. Consider a baroque fugue performed on a modern piano. Such a performance can accurately reproduce the work's contrapuntal relationships, pitch organization, and harmonic progression. From the standpoint of a thin ontology, this may be sufficient for authenticity: The essential sound structure is preserved, and the work's identity is fully realized insofar as what is perceptually salient to the listener remains intact. From a thick, or contextualist, perspective, however, something crucial is missing. A historically informed performance on a harpsichord does not merely reproduce the same notes on a different instrument; it activates a range of expressive and structural features that are tied to the instrument and performance practices for which the work was conceived. Differences in articulation, dynamic shaping, timbral contrast between manuals, and the handling of ornaments are treated as integral to how the musical structure functions and is meant to be perceived. The divergence between these positions lies in what they count as essential to the music: perceptible sound patterns alone or historically conditioned means of production as well.

A pluralist synthesis, developed most influentially by Davies (1991, 2001), seeks to reconcile the opposing intuitions that motivate thin and thick ontologies by recognizing that musical works differ in their degree of ontological thickness. Some works are relatively underdetermined: They specify few constraints beyond basic melodic, harmonic, or rhythmic structures and therefore allow considerable latitude in performance. Such works align naturally with thinner ontologies, according to which authenticity requires little more than the accurate realization of core sonic relations. Other works, by contrast, prescribe a much richer set of instrumental, technical, and expressive properties. In these cases, historically specific means of performance are not incidental but integral to the work's identity, aligning with thicker, contextualist ontologies.

Moreover, according to Davies, whether a work is ontologically thin or thick is not an intrinsic or timeless fact, but is generally the result of historically contingent conventions and compositional practices that have developed and shifted over time. As a broad tendency, earlier musical repertories in Western art music often involve comparatively thin works, while later repertories, especially from the nineteenth century onward, typically give rise to ontologically thicker works, with more tightly specified performance requirements.

On Davies's view, then, the criteria for authenticity are not uniform but depend on the nature of the work itself, which is, in itself, historical. At the same time, because musical works do not share a single ontological character across periods and genres, no single standard of authenticity can govern them all. As Davies (1991) puts it, "The totality of musical works from culture to culture and from time to time do not have any single ontological character," and, consequently, "the criteria for authenticity in musical performances are variable" (37). Authenticity is a function of a work's historically situated constitution.

The apparent disagreement between sonicist and contextualist approaches is thus resolved by acknowledging the ontological diversity of musical works themselves. For a relatively thin work, such as a Renaissance dance tune, authenticity may require little more than the accurate realization of melodic contour and rhythmic profile. For a thick work, such as a Berlioz symphony, authenticity may essentially require historically specific instruments and performance practices. Davies's framework thus refines the sonicist–contextualist debate by accommodating the deep historical contingency of musical practice without collapsing into relativism.

One crucial aspect of Davies's ontological position is the idea that a musical work is defined by a set of constraints established by the composer—constraints that are publicly accessible and normatively binding yet deliberately under-specified in terms of their exact sonic realization. In the philosophical literature, this idea is generally referred to as *intentionalism*: the view that the identity, meaning, and correct realization of artworks is grounded in the intentions of their creators, understood as publicly communicable norms structuring artistic practice. On this view, musical works are not simply collections of sounds but structured outcomes of purposive compositional acts, and their correct performance depends, at least in part, on grasping what the composer sought to realize through the score.

Within the authenticity debate (which, as noted above, frequently takes Western art music as its presumptive focus), intentionalism has gained particular traction because musical works are typically mediated by notation, which appears to function as a public vehicle for the communication of compositional intentions. Performers treat scores as authoritative guides, and when ambiguities arise, such as unclear articulation marks or missing or inconsistent indications, it is common practice to appeal to historically informed hypotheses about what the composer might have intended. This reflects a widespread intuition that performances are accountable, in a nonarbitrary way, to the composer's aims, rather than being free aesthetic constructions unconstrained by authorial design.

On Davies's (1987, 1991, 2001) account of intentionalism particularly, authenticity is not a binary condition but a scalar property of performance: A performance is more or less authentic to the extent that it is faithful to the composer's publicly expressed intentions, as encoded in the score. Importantly, these intentions function as normatively binding constraints only insofar as they are communicable and publicly accessible, rather than as private or opaque psychological states. This intentionalist underpinning provides a common basis for evaluating authenticity: It allows different views of what a musical work is to produce different standards for faithful performance, while still maintaining a shared normative criterion grounded in the composer's publicly expressed intentions.

A central feature of this model is the distinction between determinative and nondeterminative intentions. Only those intentions that are conventionally accepted as binding (e.g., those of pitch content, formal structure, or specified instrumentation) can legitimately be demanded in the name of authenticity (Davies 1987, 42). Other intentions, by contrast, function as recommendations rather than constraints (43). This distinction explains why a performer might justifiably deviate from a composer's suggested metronome marking, for instance, while not being equally free to alter the specified notes or harmonic structure.

However, even when all determinative intentions are faithfully respected, they do not dictate a single, monolithic sound. Rather, they "under-determine the sound of a faithful performance," thereby generating "a set of ideally faithful performances" against which actual performances are to be assessed (Davies 1987, 39). It is within this space of under-determination that the performer's creative contribution emerges. The performer is an interpreter who must complete the composer's necessarily incomplete specification. As Davies (1991) argues, this makes authenticity and creativity complementary rather than opposed: "If one cannot perform the work at all except by exercising one's creative skills as an interpreter…then one cannot perform the work authentically except by being creative" (23). Similarly, the ontology of the musical work itself demands interpretative agency for its realization, thereby defusing the common objection that authenticity collapses into mechanical reproduction.

Grounding authenticity in the ontological identity of a work and in publicly accessible compositional intentions, however, does not, by itself, resolve how such norms are to be applied in performance. Any account that treats intentions or historically situated practices as normatively binding must also explain how they are to be identified in light of the available evidence. Given the fragmentary and historically mediated character of most musical sources, standards of authentic performance cannot be straightforwardly extracted from the record. Ontological accounts therefore generate a further, distinct problem: how claims to authenticity can be epistemically warranted in practice.

AUTHENTICITY AND EPISTEMOLOGICAL ISSUES

Epistemology, the branch of philosophy concerned with the nature and grounds of knowledge, asks how we can know what is true or justified. Applied to the debate on musical authenticity, it concerns how claims about authentic performance can be identified, interpreted, and defended. Whereas ontological accounts specify what a performance ought to be faithful to (e.g., intentions, works, practices, or sounds), epistemology addresses whether and how performers and scholars are in a position to know which requirements matter, how they constrain performance, and with what degree of justification. In this sense, the shift from ontology to epistemology does not alter the standards of authenticity themselves but examines the conditions under which claims to authenticity can legitimately be made.

If authenticity judgments are normatively grounded in historically situated intentions and practices, their credibility depends on our epistemic access to those features and on whether the knowledge required to support such norms is both available and sufficiently determinate to guide performance. These concerns open the door to skepticism, especially regarding intentionalism: Can appeals to a composer's intentions truly bear the justificatory weight that authenticity claims demand? Put differently, is the relevant historical knowledge reliably accessible and precise enough to inform faithful performance?

A first line of critique targets the retrieval and application of compositional intentions. Indeed, even when intentions are understood, within intentionalist frameworks, as publicly expressed and conventionally encoded rather than as private psychological states, doubts remain about their determinacy and epistemic accessibility.

One influential argument along these lines, proposed by Peter Kivy (1995, 9–46, 145–187), contends that the notion of "intention" is systematically overextended in authenticity discourse. The central concern is not that composers fail to have intentions but that the concept is asked to do too much normative work. In particular, performance scholarship often treats notational markings and verbal instructions as if they all possessed the same binding force. The term "intention," however, carries a connotation of command or directive authority—analogous to a general's order—that is ill-suited to the heterogeneous character of compositional indications (Kivy 1995, 10–11). When applied to composers' varied instructions, it misrepresents their nature. Composers' notational markings and performance indications do not form a homogeneous class of normatively binding directives. Rather, they express a spectrum of attitudes: "I can urge you to play my piece allegro, or I can leave instructions that it should be played that way; I can wish it to be played that way…I can strongly or tentatively suggest a particular way of performing my music" (Kivy 1995, 10). Treating a tentative suggestion with the same authoritative force as a command projects an artificial, rigid coherence onto historically heterogeneous materials and leads to what Kivy views as the pedantry of certain historically informed performances.

This problem, however, is not merely terminological but deeply hermeneutic. Deciding which instructions are determinate and not merely recommendatory (as Davies suggests) is itself an act of historical interpretation that lacks clear criteria (Kivy 1995, 11). Scores are historically situated artifacts that presuppose conventions of notation and execution that may no longer be transparent. Surviving sources are often incomplete, inconsistent, or in tension with one another. Even within an intentionalist framework that restricts relevance to publicly accessible intentions, identifying those intentions with sufficient precision and understanding their illocutionary force remain methodologically fraught. The challenge, therefore, concerns not only which intentions matter but also how we can epistemically justify our classification of their authority in the first place.

A deeper version of this critique emphasizes the counterfactual structure implicit in many appeals to intention. To ask what a composer "intended" is to ask what they would have wanted under vastly different modern circumstances: different instruments, acoustics, performance venues, and audiences. Intentions are not context-free commands: They are desires relative to a set of available choices. Kivy illustrates this with the analogy of a person choosing a career: A woman might say she "wants to be a nurse" (Kivy 1995, 21–23), but if a sudden inheritance made medical school possible, we might learn that what she really wants is to be a

doctor. Similarly, Bach's stated wants for his *St. John Passion* were relative to the music technologies available in Leipzig in 1724. To determine his intention for a performance in a modern concert hall is to engage in a complex counterfactual: "What would Bach intend, given the choices open to him in 1990 in New York City?" (Kivy 1995, 38). Such questions "cannot be straightforwardly read off from historical evidence; they inevitably rely on conjecture and interpretive extrapolation" (40). From this perspective, Kivy concludes that a modern-instrument performance that achieves the aesthetic goals Bach valued (e.g., clarity, balance) "may very well be closer to the composer's wishes and intentions…than the performer who plays Bach on a baroque instrument with the Urtext's phrasing and dynamics as sacred writ" (45). Authenticity, therefore, cannot be secured by a simple appeal to historical intentions, because their content and application are epistemically unstable and dependent on present-day interpretive judgment. In this respect, Kivy's position clearly aligns with Taruskin's (1995) critique of the HIP movement: Appeals to supposed historical objectivity are necessarily mediated by modern interpretive frameworks, and the "authenticity" of a performance is inseparable from contemporary musical sensibilities.

A second, independent line of critique, advanced by James Young (1988), shifts the focus from compositional intentions to the possibility of recreating historical sound or historical listening experiences. Young systematically dismantles successive definitions of "authentic performance," arguing that even with perfect musicological information, the ideal is either unattractive or impossible.

His central argument is interpretive: Musical perception is never a passive registration of acoustic data but an active process of "hearing as," shaped by a listener's cultural framework and prior experiences. Young invokes a Wittgensteinian perspective: "There is no more an innocent ear than there is an innocent eye," he writes (233). Consequently, even if modern performers could replicate the exact physical sound waves of an eighteenth-century performance (a formidable practical challenge), modern listeners could not hear those sounds as an eighteenth-century audience did. Young provides concrete examples: A medieval listener heard the interval of a third as dissonant, while we hear it as consonant. An audience in Louis XIV's court heard a Lully trumpet fanfare as the "trumpet of the Sun King" (233), laden with political symbolism, while we hear it merely as a baroque trumpet sound. Thus, he argues that "the music of the past could not sound to us as it did to listeners of earlier eras…unless we shared the beliefs which enabled them to hear as they did" (234). Since we cannot shed our modern consciousness, authenticity, defined as the replication of historical experience, is epistemically inaccessible.

Young further argues that defining authenticity purely as acoustic replication (e.g., causing air to vibrate as it would have in the past) "loses sight of the point of any style of performance" (236). This claim already marks a shift from epistemological concerns about what can be known to axiological concerns about what is artistically valuable, a shift that will be explored in the next section. If the epistemic aims attributed to authenticity are misconceived, then the ideal itself risks being misdirected. On Young's view, the artistic goal of performance is meaningful communication and aesthetic satisfaction, not physical mimicry. A performance that succeeds in vibrating air "correctly" but fails to engage a modern audience artistically has missed the point entirely. The conclusion is that the concept of "authentic performance" is not a useful artistic ideal. The value of the early music movement lies in producing "successful" (236) performances that are artistically compelling to contemporary listeners.

These arguments support a strong deflationary stance: The primary objects of historical authenticity—composer intentions and historically situated modes of hearing—are either opaque or mischaracterized. Historically informed performance thus appears to rest on a problematic epistemology, one that assumes historical facts can deliver determinate and binding performance norms, and that thereby underwrites the value attributed to authenticity as a regulative ideal.

In recent years, however, this skeptical picture has been increasingly challenged by accounts that take actual performance practice as their point of departure, rather than abstract reconstructions of authenticity's supposed

aims (Ravasio 2019, 2020; for a reply, see Dodd 2020b). From a practice-based perspective, the epistemological critique misrepresents historically informed performance by construing it as a compliance-driven attempt to recover fixed historical truths. Matteo Ravasio (2019), for example, has recently argued that philosophers have propagated a "received view" of HIP as "compliance focused, impersonal, and work centered" (193), a characterization he finds belied by the evidence of practice. In practice, performers rarely treat historical sources as exhaustive or decisively authoritative. Instead, such sources function as constraints and resources within a broader interpretive process that also involves musical judgment, stylistic competence, and expressive aims. He cites lutenist Hopkinson Smith's free merging of source versions and Paolo Cherici's choice of instrument based on musical character, rather than focus on producing a historically "safe" (199) performance, as examples of this interpretive, rather than compliant, stance.

This response does not reject intentionalism but revises its epistemic implications. Historical evidence is not taken to determine performances uniquely but to delimit a space of musically viable interpretations. Authenticity, on this view, requires competence in engaging with historical materials in a reflective and informed way. As Ravasio notes, leading practitioners like flautist Barthold Kuijken explicitly fuse historical awareness with personal commitment, arguing, "My playing should sound as if I just invented the piece myself" (Kuijken 2013, 106, quoted in Ravasio 2019, 197).

This reframing also clarifies the role of performer agency. Far from suppressing individuality, historically informed practice often cultivates distinctive interpretive voices. Historical knowledge shapes, rather than replaces, creative decision-making. Moreover, much historically informed performance is not strictly work centered. Practices such as improvisation and ornamentation involve forms of musical knowledge that are practical and tacit rather than fully propositional. Here, authenticity consists less in fidelity to a determinate intention than in fluency within a historical musical language—what Bruce Haynes (2007, 142) calls "style copying" and Judith Milena Cord-to-Krax (2017, quoted in Ravasio 2019, 200–202) terms "historically informed creativity."

Understood in this way, the epistemic challenge facing performance authenticity is not the recovery of historically exact intentions or experiences—aims that may be neither feasible nor artistically relevant—but the justification of historically informed interpretations as musically credible in present practice. Authenticity thus figures as an epistemically modest ideal: It orients performance toward the past without purporting to determine it exhaustively.

This clarification, however, does not settle the question of authenticity's normative authority. Even if historically informed inquiry can support well-justified interpretive judgments, it remains open whether such judgments ought to be accorded decisive weight in performance evaluation. The issue here is no longer what can be known about past practice but why such knowledge should function as a standard for present musical action. Addressing this issue requires a shift from epistemic justification to evaluative justification: that is, from epistemology to axiology.

AUTHENTICITY AND AXIOLOGICAL ISSUES

Axiology is the branch of philosophy concerned with the nature and grounds of value. Within debates on musical authenticity, the axiological dimension addresses the reasons for valuing authenticity in performance and the scope of its normative authority. Whereas ontology investigates what constitutes an authentic performance and epistemology asks how claims to authenticity can be justified, axiology asks whether and why such claims ought to guide artistic practice. Even when unusually explicit documentary evidence exists for a work (e.g., letters, treatises, verbal instructions, or highly detailed notation) and this documentation specifies how that work ought to sound, it does not automatically follow that performers are normatively obliged to defer to that standard. Establishing what a composer intended or how music was historically performed is not sufficient on its own;

authorship alone does not confer interpretive authority. One must also consider why adherence to historical benchmarks should be regarded as desirable and whether it ought to take precedence over contemporary expressive aims or audience engagement (Young 2006, 459).

Once this axiological perspective is acknowledged, the historicist conception of performance authenticity emerges as just one possible interpretation, rather than as its exclusive or privileged form. From this vantage, there may be no single, determinate way a musical work is "meant" to sound, even in principle. Musical works are better understood as structured yet open-ended artifacts, whose realization necessarily involves interpretive agency. Consequently, the legitimacy of a performance may depend more on its intelligibility and expressive plausibility within a living musical practice than on strict fidelity to historical constraints. Authenticity, therefore, must accommodate interpretive judgment exercised under historically and culturally situated conditions. This recognition opens conceptual space for a more expansive understanding of both the meaning and the value of authenticity in musical performance.

One influential attempt to reconceive authenticity along these lines has been advanced by Kivy (1995, 108–144). His proposal shifts the focus away from historical fidelity and toward the performer's artistic agency, emphasizing authenticity as a property of the performance's relation to the performer, rather than to the past. He articulates this view through what he calls an "ostensibly nonhistorical sense of the authentic performance," one that is "authentically one's own, emanating from one's own person—authentic, in other words, as opposed to derivative or imitative" (108). He terms this concept "personal authenticity," thereby shifting evaluative attention from historical reconstruction to the performer's individuality and expressive integrity.

Personal authenticity is not grounded in emotional sincerity. Kivy explicitly rejects the idea that performers must feel the emotions expressed by the music, a requirement he regards as psychologically implausible and artistically irrelevant, and explains this idea by invoking conductor Fritz Reiner's remark, "How could I *conduct* if I were experiencing those emotions?" (Reiner quoted in Kivy 1995, 113, italics in the original). Nor does his concept of personal authenticity rest on a model of performance as assertion or quotation derived from literary theory, which Kivy (120–121) criticizes for its inability to accommodate central features of musical practice, such as literal repetition and structural recurrence.

Instead, personal authenticity is grounded in the claim that performances themselves are artistic products bearing the imprint of the performer's individuality. If performers are properly described as performing artists, then performances may be evaluated by artistic criteria, such as originality and personal style (Kivy 1995, 122–123). In this sense, a personally authentic performance is one that bears "the special stamp of personality that marks it out from all others as Horowitz's or Serkin's, Bernstein's or Toscanini's" (123). Personal authenticity thus names the presence of a distinctive artistic voice.

To support this claim, Kivy draws an analogy between performance and musical arrangement. Like an arranger, the performer begins with a preexisting work and produces a particular version of it through choices of tempo, articulation, phrasing, dynamics, and, where applicable, ornamentation or realization. These choices are not merely executory but constitute the sonic result. Different performances of the same work differ because, in a meaningful sense, "the notes were different" (132). Interpretation is therefore indispensable: To produce a credible version of a work, the performer must grasp "how the work 'goes'" and form an interpretive conception of it (138). Personal authenticity, on this account, emerges from interpretive engagement shaped by a particular artistic sensibility, rather than from arbitrary deviation.

Importantly, according to Kivy, historicist conceptions of authenticity are structurally incompatible with personal authenticity. While historicist approaches typically require the performer to suppress individual stylistic traits in the service of historical reconstruction, personal authenticity aims precisely at inscribing "the indelible mark of personal style and (one hopes) personal originality on the 'object,' that is, performance" (138). Treating personal authenticity as a fallback option, something exercised only where historical knowledge fails, reduces it

to a mere consolation prize (138–139) and fails to respect its status as an independent artistic ideal. Authenticity, on this view, inevitably involves a trade-off: You get one, you lose one.

Not all theorists, however, accept that the relationship between historical and personal authenticity is an inescapable zero-sum one, as Kivy suggests. Some reject the strongest historicist claim, according to which fidelity to historical intentions alone discloses the "true work," while nevertheless maintaining that historical guidance can retain a qualified normative role. Aron Edidin (1998), for instance, has argued that sensitivity to a composer's performance-related indications often has genuine aesthetic value, without implying that such considerations exhaust or override the performer's own artistic contribution. On this view, there is good prima facie reason to expect that a composer's performance-related indications will often be aesthetically valuable (82), not because of their authority as historical facts, but because they typically embody musical judgment relevant to the performer's own task of shaping sound. Performance is thus reconceived as a collaborative enterprise (87), in which composer and performer jointly contribute to the artistic outcome. Historical knowledge, on this account, does not constrain personal artistry but can enrich it by expanding the material available for interpretation (89–90). As a result, the performer's individuality and the composer's guidance need not compete for normative priority; an excellent performance may plausibly reflect both historical sensitivity and personal originality (87).

Authenticity, here, is no longer a matter of exclusive allegiance to the composer's intent but a resource whose value depends on how it is artistically integrated into the performer's larger artistic vision. Yet this conciliatory strategy leaves open a deeper problem: What, precisely, is the nonhistorical norm that governs performance once historical fidelity is no longer treated as authoritative? If historical considerations are only prima facie reasons, what ultimately determines whether a performance succeeds or fails?

An alternative proposal, exemplified by Julian Dodd (2012, 2020a; see also Puy 2022), addresses this question by preserving interpretive freedom while maintaining a firmly work-directed conception of performance and does so without appealing either to strict historicism or to self-directed models of authenticity. On this view, authenticity beyond historical fidelity should not be identified with faithfulness to the performer's self but with fidelity to the work as grasped through interpretation. From this perspective, two claims are central (Dodd 2020a, 96–97). First, even if personal authenticity were a necessary condition for originality, it would not follow that it is itself a good-making feature of performances. Originality may be valuable, but its value does not derive from the performer's sincerity or self-expression as such. Second, and more fundamentally, individuality in performance need not be grounded in self-expression at all. Distinctiveness can emerge as a byproduct of interpretive understanding, rather than as the aim of performance. This marks a contrast between inward-looking models, which treat performance as a vehicle for expressing an artistic self, and outward-looking models, which prioritize making musical sense of the work.

This contrast is reflected in a familiar evaluative ideal within classical performance practice: the praise of performances in which the performer appears to "disappear." Properly understood, this metaphor does not denote the absence of individuality but the subordination of the performer's personality to the intelligibility of the work (Dodd 2020a, 104). Here, individuality remains operative, but its role is instrumental rather than expressive. On this basis, Dodd proposes *interpretive authenticity* as an alternative to both historicist and personalist models. Interpretive authenticity consists in performing a work in a manner that reflects a coherent, informed, and musically illuminating understanding of it (89). The performer's individuality is not eliminated but functions as the medium through which the work is grasped and articulated, rather than as the object of expression.

The normative structure of this position can be clarified as follows. Performances are evaluated entirely in terms of how they present a work's musical content, not in terms of the performer's psychological states or biographical relation to the performance. The performer's artistic personality matters only insofar as it contributes to understanding and communicating the work. Accordingly, the ideal of self-effacement does not require the performer "to be a cipher, but only that her contribution remain in the service of the work" (Puy 2022, 136). The trope of "disappearance" thus expresses the priority of work-directed norms rather than a demand for self-

erasure. From this standpoint, treating individuality as an independent performance norm risks distorting the practice of interpretation. When performances are governed primarily by the imperative of personal authenticity, they can lapse into aesthetic imposition rather than interpretation. The difficulty is not individuality as such but individuality detached from responsiveness to the work's internal demands (Dodd 2020a, 109; Puy 2022, 139).

The prioritization of interpretive authenticity over strict score compliance has not gone unchallenged (for criticism, see Davies 2013; Rohrbaugh 2019). One fundamental objection maintains that the contrast between score fidelity and interpretive insight rests on a false dichotomy (Kania 2022, 2025). On this view, performing a classical work is governed by a single constitutive norm: The performer must demonstrate an understanding of the work by faithfully realizing its score. Score fidelity is therefore not merely an instrumental guideline that may be overridden in the name of deeper insight; it is an essential condition for performing the work at all. Because the score is seen as ontologically central to the work's identity, intentional departures from work-determinative instructions produce a derivative artifact—an arrangement, adaptation, or interpretation—rather than a fully authentic performance. Even well-motivated interpretive choices cannot compensate for violations of these essential instructions.

A further challenge comes from the opposite direction. Contrary to score-centered approaches, Alessandro Bertinetto (2019) proposes an alternative grounded in what he terms "truthfulness to the moment" (10). Within improvisational practices, from jazz and free improvisation to baroque figured bass, authenticity consists in the performer's attentiveness and responsiveness to the unfolding musical situation, including responsiveness to and interaction with co-performers and the audience (9–10).

This view challenges the assumption that authenticity must be assessed relative to a fixed musical work. Claims that improvisation is inauthentic because it fails to comply with a score presuppose what Bertinetto calls a "*Werktreue* framework" (2019, 12), according to which the primary normative task of performance is fidelity to a preexisting, authoritative work defined by its score. Bertinetto argues that this framework is misplaced in practices where no fixed work functions as the primary normative object. In such contexts, music-making is not the execution of a precomposed structure but the real-time generation of musical form, and standards of authenticity grounded in score compliance therefore lose their force. Authenticity is instead located in situational responsiveness: the ability to act meaningfully and coherently within the contingencies of performance.

Importantly, Bertinetto extends this insight beyond explicitly improvisatory practices. Even in work-based performance, successful interpretation requires responsiveness to the irreducible singularity of the event—which depends on factors like acoustics, ensemble dynamics, and audience interaction—none of which can be fully specified in advance (Bertinetto 2019, 21–22). On this view, sensitivity to the present situation is a constitutive condition of musical performance, whereas strict score compliance is only conditionally valuable and depends on the norms of the practice in question.

Historical, interpretive, and performance-centered conceptions of authenticity correspond to distinct evaluative concerns that can come into tension within musical practice. Taken together, they support a pluralist understanding of authenticity. Rather than being grounded in a single privileged source, authenticity appears to be best understood as indexing a family of values that matter for different reasons in different contexts. The central question, therefore, is not whether authenticity ought to govern performance *as such*, but under what conditions, and for what purposes, particular forms of authenticity deserve normative weight. On this view, authenticity has a conditional rather than categorical value: It matters not because it secures fidelity to an authoritative past but because, in specific circumstances, it can promote broader artistic goods, such as understanding, coherence, expressivity, communicative success, and responsiveness to the present situation.

AUTHENTICITY AND CULTURAL ISSUES

Up to this point, authenticity has been analyzed primarily in relation to performances as realizations of works, practices, or values. However, this framework remains incomplete so long as it treats *performers* as normatively interchangeable. Indeed, in many musical contexts, assessments of authenticity are not exhausted by how a performance relates to a work or a tradition but also depend on the performer's position relative to that tradition. This introduces a further dimension of evaluation, concerned with questions of authority, participation, and cultural standing. In such cases, authenticity judgments turn on whether, and in what sense, a performer is entitled to represent or enact a musical practice, rather than solely on how competently the music is performed. Here, authenticity cannot be reduced to fidelity to notes or rhythms alone; it becomes a matter of cultural engagement. In this sense, authentic performance requires a substantive relationship to the social contexts from which a musical form emerges. Clearly, no musical practice is independent of culture. All music, Western art music included, is embedded in the social life of its makers and audiences and thus subject, in various ways, to questions of cultural authenticity. For example, debates surrounding the construction of national styles, particularly in the nineteenth century, turn on questions of who may legitimately represent a music culture and under what conditions. Within the recent philosophical literature, however, such issues have been most explicitly theorized through examples drawn from genres outside the Western classical tradition, such as the blues, jazz, Afro-Cuban music, and hip-hop, where cultural belonging and historical experience are often taken to play a constitutive role in shaping the music's identity. Just as historically informed classical performance negotiates between composer intention and situational responsiveness, genres in which musicians and listeners self-consciously reference their cultural setting demand a pluralist, context-sensitive approach to authenticity.

At the core of the cultural debate about musical authenticity are two primary challenges. The first, which we can call the *proprietary claim*, maintains that musical forms are inseparable from the communities that produced them. Outsiders cannot perform the music authentically because the work is embedded in particular social, historical, and cultural experiences. In the blues, for example, music emerges from the African American experience of oppression and resistance; performance by outsiders is therefore both ethically fraught and potentially aesthetically compromised (Rudinow 1994, 129–130). This position emphasizes cultural belonging as a prerequisite for authenticity, making identity inseparable from musical legitimacy. This is not to say that this music is merely "social" or does not have a sophisticated aesthetics but only that one way in which authenticity operates here is in terms of cultural belonging.

The second challenge, the *experiential claim*, shifts attention from musical ownership to firsthand knowledge of the conditions that produce the music. This claim states that technical mastery alone is insufficient without immersion in the social and historical experiences that inform idiomatic phrasing and stylistic conventions. Authenticity, on this view, requires internalizing the idiom's cultural, social, and emotional context, so that performance conveys meaning beyond mere notes and rhythms (Rudinow 1994, 133; Taylor 1995, 313). In many jazz, hip-hop, or Afro-Cuban traditions, and other ones as well, performers must understand the lived experience and expressive nuances that give the music its significance.

These claims also impose internal constraints on performers, insofar as they emphasize an expectation that musicians remain faithful to the values of the community or subculture from which they emerge. At the same time, however, cultural membership is not merely constraining but also enabling: It provides performers with the experiences and frameworks of meaning that both motivate musical activity and furnish its raw material. Musicologist and philosopher Ralf von Appen (2013, 43–44) captures the normative dimension of these expectations under the heading of "socio-cultural authenticity." Importantly, socio-cultural authenticity can come into direct conflict with other conceptions of authenticity, most notably those that prioritize artistic self-determination. A paradigmatic case is Bob Dylan's electric performance at the 1965 Newport Folk Festival (von Appen 2013, 43). For members of the folk revival movement, Dylan's adoption of rock instrumentation

was experienced as a betrayal of the genre's political and communal ideals and thus as a failure of socio-cultural authenticity. By contrast, defenders of Dylan interpreted the same gesture as an expression of personal authenticity: an artist refusing to subordinate his creative trajectory to communal expectations (von Appen 2013, 44).

The restrictive implications of socio-cultural authenticity have prompted an opposing line of argument, which focuses on the learnability of cultural and stylistic competence. Here, membership in a culture group or one's geographic origin are not considered as decisive. Authenticity is instead something that can be cultivated through disciplined immersion in a tradition through the study of historical recordings, the acquisition of idiomatic vocabulary, and sustained engagement with the relevant musical practices. As Joel Rudinow (1994) argues, musicians who are not African American can achieve stylistic fidelity and expressive integrity in the blues or jazz without sharing the social identity of the tradition's originators (134). What ultimately grounds authenticity, on this account, is what the performer knows, understands, and is able to express. One might extend the point by noting that such competence may also be deepened through engagement with the broader social practices and lived experiences that give the music its cultural significance.

A refinement of this position distinguishes between non-innovative and innovative forms of appropriation (Young 2006, 460–461). Here, the word "appropriation" is used in a neutral sense to denote processes of cultural borrowing rather than in its more familiar, pejorative sense. Replicative, non-innovative appropriation, understood as the direct imitation of existing forms without significant transformation, is more likely to be perceived as derivative. Innovative appropriation, by contrast, involves the selective adoption and reworking of borrowed elements in ways that extend or reinterpret the tradition and can therefore result in works that are both personally and stylistically authentic. This distinction shows well that authenticity is not determined by the performer's identity alone but by how musical materials are understood, deployed, and situated within an evolving practice.

The notion of "style authenticity" (Young 2006, 474–475) may help to better explain why some forms of appropriation are judged derivative while others are not. Style authenticity concerns a performer's command of the internal norms of a tradition, including its idiomatic vocabulary, formal constraints, expressive gestures, and performance conventions. A performance can fail stylistically not because the performer lacks cultural membership but because it treats stylistic features as surface markers, rather than as elements governed by an internal musical logic. In such cases, imitation takes place in a mechanical fashion and is therefore experienced as derivative. By contrast, when stylistic conventions are grasped as generative resources rather than fixed templates, performers can produce style-authentic results, even while transforming the material.

Historically informed performances of baroque music illustrate this point. Contemporary musicians, though culturally and temporally distant from Bach or Handel, can produce stylistically authentic performances by mastering period instruments, rhetorical principles, and historically grounded performance practices. These performances are not derivative simply because they are imitative; rather, they succeed when stylistic knowledge enables informed interpretive choice rather than rigid replication (Young 2006, 474–475).

The same logic applies to genres in which performers and audiences are especially self-reflexive about the ways that their music is situated in its social and cultural context. On this view, musicians who are not African American may acquire style authenticity in the blues by internalizing idiomatic phrasing, rhythmic feel, and expressive conventions through sustained study and immersion. When stylistic understanding functions at a structural and expressive level, performances can avoid mere pastiche and instead contribute meaningfully to the tradition. What distinguishes non-derivative appropriation, in this sense, is not innovation for its own sake but competent participation in a stylistic practice understood as a living system.

"Existential authenticity" (Young 2006, 471–472) is what specifies the condition under which stylistic mastery becomes more than mechanical compliance: It concerns whether conformity to a style is animated by genuine artistic commitment, expressive intention, and, where relevant, a meaningful form of social or

cultural engagement. Even when performers lack the original cultural or social context of a musical tradition, they may produce authentic works if they are fully invested in the expressive possibilities of its materials and capable of endowing them with new significance. A secular musician performing a Bach cantata or a European artist adopting blues idioms may thus convey emotional depth and artistic meaning without inhabiting the work's original theological or cultural framework (Bestman 1984, 116; Young 2006, 471–472). On this view, authenticity is grounded less in historical or cultural fidelity than in the performer's engaged realization of the music's expressive potential.

However, existential authenticity alone does not resolve how such performances are received or evaluated within the traditions they draw upon. A performance may be existentially authentic from the standpoint of the performer's commitment yet still be judged inauthentic by audiences for whom the music carries meanings specifically tied to their social identity. This gap between expressive intention and cultural recognition motivates a shift from performer-centered accounts to relational conceptions of authenticity.

From a relational perspective, authenticity is not an intrinsic property of a performance but an outcome of the interactions among performers, audiences, and shared frameworks of meaning. Drawing on pragmatist accounts of aesthetic experience, this view emphasizes that authenticity judgments often track listeners' experiences, rather than performers' internal states or technical capacities (Taylor 1995, 313). Musical genres, on this account, function as culturally situated practices and may, for example, operate as "racial projects" (Taylor 1995, 313) in which particular histories and identities are articulated. Authenticity is therefore assessed in terms of whether performances resonate with the expectations and lived experiences of a given audience, rather than solely by reference to stylistic correctness or expressive sincerity.

Extending this relational approach, authenticity can be understood as a community-mediated process, shaped by ongoing negotiation rather than fixed criteria. In genres where questions of identity and tradition are especially salient, boundaries of authenticity are actively constructed and contested by performers, audiences, and institutions. Country music in the US offers a clear example: Its claims to authenticity were historically shaped by music industry practices that deliberately produced racially segregated musical categories, distinguishing "race records" from "hillbilly" or "old-time" music (Dyck 2021, 7, 9). These classifications did not merely reflect preexisting musical differences but actively manufactured notions of authenticity for commercial and social ends (9).

Within this framework, authenticity discourse functions less as a test of artistic legitimacy than as a mechanism of communal self-definition. Authenticity claims operate as strategic moves within what has been described as an ongoing "game" through which communities negotiate values, boundaries, and identities (Malone 2023). The familiar tension between traditionalist and progressive positions within musical genres can thus be understood not as a disagreement over objective criteria but as a struggle over how a community understands its past, its present practices, and its future trajectory.

CONCLUSION

This article has discussed philosophical debates about musical authenticity by distinguishing the different kinds of questions that structure them. Once ontological, epistemological, axiological, and cultural concerns are analytically separated, it becomes clearer why disagreements about authenticity have been persistent. Many apparent conflicts arise not from direct disagreement over a single claim, but from the fact that participants often address different questions while using the same term and therefore operate with different assumptions about what authenticity is meant to secure.

On this analysis, authenticity refers to a range of considerations that can play different roles in different musical practices. Historical fidelity, interpretive understanding, expressive commitment, and cultural recognition

can each ground authenticity claims, but none of these considerations has general or unconditional priority. Disputes about authenticity are therefore better understood as disagreements about the relevance and weight of different standards in particular contexts, rather than as attempts to identify a uniquely correct account.

The normative significance of authenticity is accordingly conditional and practice dependent. Its force varies with the kind of music at issue, the epistemic role assigned to historical knowledge, and the values taken to be relevant to performance. Acknowledging this plurality clarifies how authenticity continues to function as a meaningful but contested term in musical discourse, a framework for assessing how performances relate to works, historical practices, performers, and cultural contexts. Understood in this way, the question of how the music of the past should be performed is not answered by appeal to authenticity alone but by specifying the purposes for which authenticity is being invoked.

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